

COLOSSIANS - CHAPTER TWO

In chapter one, Paul having introduced himself and his co-writer Timothy lays the foundation for the whole book. His theme could be paraphrased as 'how to be spiritually rich in Christ'. Using this metaphor we could think of Paul and Timothy as tellers in the bank of heaven. The 'saints and faithful brethren' are bank customers. 'Grace and peace' is the mission statement. The 'hope laid up for you in heaven' becomes the account balance. The 'word of truth, the gospel' is the bank statement and 'love which you have for all the saints' indicates how the riches are to be spent. It is the bank's currency. 'Faith in Christ Jesus' is the signature or 'PIN' which releases the funds. 'Constantly bearing fruit and increasing' suggests that they have been spending the resources well. Epaphras is the local branch manager. (1:1-8)

Paul's hope, expressed in prayer, is that the spiritual economy of Colossae will continue to grow. He explains that there is a cycle of growth which begins with more knowledge of the assets available, is expressed in more changed behaviour and leads back to more knowledge which in turn results in His power being let loose in us. That power will show in the very down to earth qualities of steadfastness, patience and joy. Again Paul reminds us to use our 'PIN' in giving thanks so that we can enjoy our inheritance. (1:9-12)

Paul goes on to explain how our assets in heaven were established. Sin had got us hopelessly into debt with God. Jesus redeemed us, paying off our debt completely on condition that we changed banks from the Devil's bank to His. (1:13,14)

But before trusting ourselves to Jesus Christ, we need to check who He is. Jesus is the only way God has shown Himself to man throughout history. He is not only the Creator of everything but the One who keeps the universe going. He is also head of the church, the One who wants to be allowed to keep us going. Because of who He is, all the resources of heaven are available to Him and therefore, yes, He is able to pay off the debts of all of us. Despite the fact that we were totally opposed to him, He offered unconditional friendship in which we would have a completely clean record. The one condition for enjoying this is the 'PIN', faith, by which we depend consistently on Him and the bank statement, the gospel, which people like Paul, teach us. (1:15-23)

Paul concludes the chapter by reviewing his role as a minister, a teller of the bank of heaven. His job is tough but he loves it. He suffers as his Boss suffered. His task is to make crystal clear the message with which he has been entrusted. His message was a mystery in the past but need be no longer. It is to tell us how rich we are in the potential to be like God because Jesus Christ lives in us. Paul's aim is nothing less than making sure that every man, woman and child knows and enjoys fully how rich they can be in Christ. He is putting everything into it – in Christ's strength.(1:24-29)

Chapter two opens the case of the rich who are being robbed. First look for appropriate divisions for this chapter. My suggestions are verses 1-5; 6,7; 8-15; 16-19; 20-23.

SECTION 1 – 2:1-5

Q.1 For whom and for what had Paul been struggling? Describe according to verses 2 and 3 the steps in spiritual growth which Paul outlines here. How is 'the mystery' the key to growing strong in Christ? How is this section developing further the last few verses of chapter one?

Q.2 In verse 4 Paul begins a series of four warnings about common threats to healthy Christian living, 4 ways in which we can be robbed of our riches in Christ. What is the first one? What technique does it use? What confidence does Paul have that the Colossians will be able to resist this attack?

SECTION 2 – 2:6,7

Q.3 What does Paul regard as the secret of not being harmed by 'persuasive argument'? How did we receive Christ Jesus the Lord? How is this also the secret of living the Christian life? What illustration does Paul use in verse 7 to explain how faith operates?

SECTION 3 – 2:8-15

Q.4 What according to verse 8 is the second way in which we can be robbed of enjoying our riches in Christ? What common examples can you suggest by which this happens today? What do you suppose is meant by 'elementary principles of this world'? What is the alternative to being deceived?

Q.5 Our protection against being deceived by philosophy is to be 'in Christ'. List all that it means to be 'in Christ'. Against each item on your list explain first what it means in ordinary words and secondly what practical difference it makes. Thirdly explain just how this protects us against being deceived.

Q.6 What four every day illustrations does Paul use in verses 11-18 to demonstrate the effect of Jesus' death and resurrection? How does each illustration emphasise an aspect of our protection against deception?

SECTION 4 – 2:16-19

Q.7 What according to verse 16 is the third way in which we can be robbed of our riches in Christ? What two basic examples does use Paul? What have we missed if we allow this to happen to us? Give common examples of how we are judged by others today?

Q.8 What according to verse 18 is the fourth way of being robbed? What examples of this problem does Paul give? Again give examples of the same threats today. What protection does being 'in Christ' give against being robbed in this way?

SECTION 5 – 2:20-23

Q.9 In this final section Paul returns to the problem of verse 16. What examples does he give this time? Why is legalism so damaging to our enjoyment of Christ? Why do such rules not work? How do they deceive us into believing we are growing spiritually? What unsolved problems remain?

Q.10 Sum up in a couple of sentences what were the false teachings which threatened to ruin Epaphras' ministry in Colossae?